

The End of God's Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 1:1–7, 1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 14:6–12, Luke 11:23, 1 Tim. 2:4, Rev. 21:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . . ?” (2 Peter 3:11, 12, NKJV).

The book of Revelation fills the mind with scenes of the end. The epicenter of the book deals with the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. Satan has lost his legal hold over the earth, and now he pursues those who remain loyal to God. The book climaxes with Jesus' return to deliver His children, both the living righteous and those faithful ones who have died since the fall of Adam and Eve. The book shows us, too, the destruction of Satan and the wicked by fire, and Jesus' establishment of His eternal kingdom on the earth made new.

Students of Revelation enthusiastically explore and seek to identify the predicted signs and events that mark church history from the first century AD to our day in the end of time. They are right to do so, too.

However, in this quarter's final lesson, we will see that Revelation is a missionary book focused on a missionary God who is calling us to be a missionary church. Our calling to proclaim “present truth” to the world will exist right up until everyone has made the choice for or against God.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 30.

Revelation: God's Last-Day Mission

The opening lines of Revelation indicate to the reader that this book is focused on God's mission.

Read Revelation 1:1–7. In what ways do you see evidence that Revelation is focused on God's mission in the last days?

After revealing in the first verses that Jesus is the source and focus of Revelation, Revelation 1:4, 5 alludes to all Three Members of the Godhead, who are working unitedly to save human beings. The Father is the eternal one who was and is and is to come. The Holy Spirit, who is working powerfully among the first-century churches, is named. Then John recalls the status of Jesus Christ—the “faithful witness,” “the firstborn of the dead” (*Rev. 1:5, NRSV*), who possesses legal ownership of this planet. Satan's attempt to use this earth to establish his kingdom is ruined. In addition to God's victory over Satan, our Creator's shed blood washes away our guilt and shame.

Read Revelation 1:6 and 1 Peter 2:9. What do the titles for the redeemed in these verses signify?

The focus of God's mission is not simply to drag perishing people to safety. God's salvation offers a new and honorable status, because God's image is restored in us. The redeemed become royalty (kings) because we are blood-related to the King of the universe through Jesus' shed blood. Now, as royal family members, we join the mission of the royal family in the salvation of other human beings. This makes us priests! Christ had constituted His church a “kingdom” and its individual members “priests.” To be a member of the kingdom is to be a priest.

In Revelation 1:7, we find the urgency of mission: Jesus is coming, and the nations will mourn because they are lost. God longs after those who are estranged from Him.

The book of Revelation opens, then, with God's mission for human beings.

Not only have we been created by God, but we have been redeemed by Him, and at such an amazing cost, too. Why should this truth give us so much hope, no matter our present situation?

The Three Angels' Messages and Mission

The book of Revelation gives us a powerful and graphic representation of the great controversy theme, perhaps most dramatically depicted in Revelation 12:12: “Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (NKJV). It’s hard to imagine how anyone can understand anything in Scripture apart from the great controversy motif, which will climax in the last days.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. What is depicted here, and what have these verses to do with our mission and message?

Central to mission, God’s mission, is the message, God’s message: the gospel. The message, in a real sense, is the mission. The world needs to be warned about what is coming upon it, and every person will be forced to make a choice, a choice either for life or for death.

“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Luke 11:23, NKJV).

What is Jesus saying here that deals so directly with our mission?

The three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 form the core, the heart, of what we as Seventh-day Adventists have been called to proclaim to the world. Central to it, foundational to it, are two themes: “the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6, NKJV) and the worship of the Creator. These two themes appear in this depiction of the saints: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12, NKJV). No matter what else we do—all the good that we do in helping people—we must never lose sight of our special calling and mission, which is to proclaim to a lost world the hope found in the “everlasting gospel,” as well as to warn the world of what will one day come upon it.

“He who is not with Me is against Me” (Luke 11:23, NKJV). How do you understand what Jesus is saying to us here? Why should these words cause us to examine where our hearts really are?

The Final Crisis

Jesus said to His disciples and to us: “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (*Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV*). This is the Great Commission, and in many ways the three angels’ messages, with a call to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*), is simply the “present truth” (*2 Pet. 1:12*) expression of the Great Commission.

Read 1 John 4:8, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 Timothy 2:4, and Genesis 12:3. Why does every group of people matter to God?

Christ’s love is for all humanity, with no people group excluded. Contrary to the theology that teaches that Christ died only for a predestined elite, the Bible is clear that Christ’s death was for all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, or any other factor. If you are a human being, Christ died for you. Period. The only question remaining for anyone is, *How do you respond to His death?*

When Jesus returns, there will be only two overt camps: those who have submitted to the authority of Satan through religious and political institutions as shown in Revelation 13 and 17, and those who have fully submitted to Jesus Christ, whose faith is made manifest by their keeping “the commandments of God” (*Rev. 14:12*).

Since the beginning, human beings have had evidence of who God is and of His way of righteousness and love (*Rom. 1:18–21*). Therefore, all human beings from ages past will be judged based on how they cooperated with God and how they lived—regardless of how much they did or didn’t understand (*Rom. 2:11–16*).

But in this time of the end, there is a growing polarization, and no longer will freedom of conscience be respected. People will be pressed to align themselves with Satan’s party. It is urgent that the gospel be proclaimed and the serious news about Satan’s strategies be exposed. And that is exactly what the three angels’ messages, and our mission, are all about.

Dwell on the fact that Christ has died for you personally. What could possibly make you think that anything you have done, no matter how bad, could not have been sufficiently paid for by the death of Christ on the cross?

Success in Mission

What is success in mission? We might be tempted to think that it is many baptisms, big churches, and rapid growth rates. We might feel that success consists of entering every tribe and people group on earth with the truth and that we can speed it up by using radio, the internet, and TV. While all of this can be good, we must remember what Paul wrote to the community of faith in Corinth: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (*1 Cor. 3:6, NKJV*). In other words, our focus is to be on the process; God’s focus will be on the growth.

We have already seen that the object of God’s mission is saving the lost in every people group on earth by making them loyal disciples of Jesus who are involved in His mission.

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the character of those who become followers of Jesus?

2 Cor. 11:2 _____

Isa. 30:21; John 10:27; John 16:12, 13 _____

2 Thess. 2:9–11; Heb. 3:12, 13; 1 John 1:8 _____

1 John 1:9, Rev. 7:14, Rev. 19:8 _____

Disciples of Jesus are pure, remaining loyal to Him as a pure bride would to her betrothed. They follow Jesus as He leads them by the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. This includes leading us into missionary work for others. There is no deception in these disciples. They are not led astray by debilitating doubt, false teachings, or immorality. And they do not feel morally superior to others. They recognize that they are imperfect, requiring God’s cleansing grace and mercy. Understanding this, they also are open to receiving correction and instruction from other believers. Success in mission results in making this type of disciple.

What does it mean to be a “chaste virgin to Christ” (*2 Cor. 11:2*)? How can we, as sinners, be this before God and point others to becoming chaste virgins to Christ, as well?

Mission Complete

Read Revelation 21:1–4 and Revelation 21:22–22:5. What is the scene described here?

What a paradise the new earth will be! Death and sin will be gone, Satan and wickedness destroyed. We will meet our loving Savior and reunite with loved ones. And the new earth will be populated with representatives from every ethnicity and language.

The General Conference Mission Board has approved Global Mission metrics that can be used to determine whether a people group is reached or unreached. A “reached people group” is one that has adequate numbers and resources to witness effectively to the rest of the group without requiring outside assistance; it has worship services, Bibles, and other literature in their first language; and there are indigenous church leaders who can witness to the rest of the people group without working through a translator.

An “unreached people group” is one that has no indigenous community of believing Adventists with adequate numbers and resources to witness effectively to their own group without assistance from outside their culture.

Each local church and conference must determine the people groups in their community who need to be reached. Now is the time to invest in God’s mission of making disciples in all people groups, hastening our Savior’s return and, in the end, living with them in the new heaven and new earth that is promised to us here.

Challenge: How are you hastening Christ’s return? Are you planting seeds of hope in the hearts of those who need to hear good news? Are you “watering” new believers by helping them learn what it means to live a life of loyal obedience to Christ? Pray for opportunities to communicate the promise of the earth made new with the people on your daily prayer list.

Challenge Up: Some of your “disciples” may be ready to accept Christ. This includes joining a church or group of believers. Put yourself in his or her place and imagine attending your church for the first time. What kind of experience would he or she have? How prepared is your church to welcome and disciple new people? Are you open to starting new groups of believers, not just building up your own existing church? Create a strategy to address weak areas. Share your thoughts with your church leaders, and work with them to implement a plan to become a more intentional disciple-making church.

Further Thought: “The great plan of redemption results in fully bringing back the world into God’s favor. All that was lost by sin is restored. Not only man but the earth is redeemed, to be the eternal abode of the obedient. For six thousand years Satan has struggled to maintain possession of the earth. Now God’s original purpose in its creation is accomplished. ‘The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.’”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 342.

But before that can become a reality, it is our duty to partner with God in His mission to reach the world with the message of warning so that people can accept and be a part of God’s promise of re-creation.

“I long to see very many laborers at work for those who know not the evidences of our faith. Many have received great light through hearing the three angels’ messages, and now they should proclaim these messages in all parts of the world. I desire to do my part and to open the way for others to carry the light of truth. May the Lord help us to put the armor on. The believers are to unite in the solemn work of giving the last note of warning to the world.”—Ellen G. White, Letter 390, 1907 (unpublished).

Throughout this quarter we have studied various aspects and issues related to God’s mission. This week we concluded our study by exploring Revelation’s keys to understanding what a restored relationship with God looks like, and it climaxed with a vision of the mission fulfilled—the re-creation and restoration of the earth. While it is true that the destruction of sin and suffering will be the most terrifying days of earth’s history, God casts our vision to a time beyond this destruction and provides comfort and encouragement in the promise of the earth restored.

Discussion Question:

- 1 What is the “everlasting gospel”? Why is it “everlasting”? And why must what it teaches be foundational to our mission?
- 2 Why do we have such an emphasis on the three angels’ messages? How do you respond to the argument that we need to focus on Jesus and not on something as supposedly “negative” as these messages, which include very strong warnings?
- 3 How has this quarter helped you better understand not only the importance of mission but how you and your church could better participate in it, which is what we have been called to do?

Dreaming Dreams: Part 3

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Joseph Delamou had prayed to God to reveal His true church, but Joseph didn't know where to worship in Conakry, capital of the French-speaking country of Guinea in West Africa. After studying the Bible with his English teacher, a Seventh-day Adventist named Fortunate Kaloubilori, he fasted for three days and pleaded with God to reveal His will.

Then Joseph had a dream in which he was locked up in prison. A prison guard was a relative, and he begged him for freedom. "I cannot free you even though we are from the same family," the relative said.

Joseph attempted to escape but was caught and reproved by his relative.

"Don't play with me," the relative said. "If you try that again, I will punish you in a way that you will never forget."

A voice boomed out with a description of the punishment. "Someone will bring straw and put it under you and set it on fire," the voice said.

Joseph understood that the punishment represented hell after Jesus' coming. He prayed, "I'm not better than the others. Only don't let me die here. I want to accomplish something for You before I die."

After the prayer, he was somehow removed from the prison cell and into the presence of three soldiers. One soldier said, "Joseph, you must pay the ransom for your freedom."

"Only God freed me, not you," Joseph replied. "Jesus paid the price on the cross. I owe you nothing."

But the soldier insisted, "If you don't pay, we will take you back to prison."

"My freedom did not come from you, and you cannot go against God, who freed me," Joseph said. "My life depends on God, and if you harm me, you are not harming me but God."

The soldiers left, and Joseph turned around and saw Fortunate.

"Your freedom is from God," Fortunate assured him.

Then Joseph woke up. It was 3:00 A.M., and he was sweating. The dream seemed so real.

He prayed, "Thank You, God. Every time I ask for help, You answer me. I thank You, not for answering me but for loving me."



Today, Joseph is 24 and a faithful Adventist.

"When I was a child, I asked God to lead me to the right path," he said. "God answered this prayer by bringing me to the Adventist Church. I am ready to serve God."

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath will help spread the gospel in the West-Central Africa Division, which includes Guinea. Thank you for your generous offering.

Part I: Overview

The second coming of Jesus, which leads to the re-creation of this earth, is the culmination of the biblical story. Revelation 21 and 22 could be described as the ultimate “happy” ending. And in some sense, this is an accurate interpretation. From this perspective, the Second Coming and the new earth are the end of God’s mission. The end is an eternal life of happiness and joy with God. In another sense, this ending is not the “end” but the beginning, or continuation, of what God intended for humanity and for the earth, a beginning in which the redeemed deepen their understanding of God and His character throughout eternity.

It may be helpful to think of God’s revelation of Himself in three phases, with each phase requiring different definitions of “mission.” (1) The first phase comprises the world’s creation and God’s interaction with His created beings in Eden. Even in Eden, God’s mission was to reveal, through loving relationships, who He was. But sin altered this reality, leading to the world we dwell in, a world full of misery, pain, suffering, and death. (2) This great change required God’s mission to take on new elements, most specifically the need for the Incarnation, leading to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Incarnation makes possible the future reality of the new earth. (3) The final phase of God’s mission reaches its climax at the Second Coming.

But the Second Coming is not the end of humanity or God’s story. Eternal life would be meaningless if the Second Coming heralded only the end of this earth’s history. Instead, eternity is a new beginning of infinite possibilities.

Part II: Commentary

As Seventh-day *Adventists*, we rightfully emphasize the Second Coming in our churches and in our evangelism. The world desperately needs the message of hope that the Second Coming provides. Equally important is the biblical description of the new earth, which is not some heavenly realm in the clouds but rather a re-created earth that in many ways resembles our current world. The significant difference between the new earth and this earth is that there are no longer problems from sin and death.

From the time Adam and Eve chose to follow a path contrary to the loving way shown by God, humanity and the earth, as a whole, have faced suffering and death. Such a fate was not what God intended

for humanity, but it was a possibility in a world of free will, which is required in order for love to exist. For us in the world today, we currently find ourselves in this phase of God's mission. God's mission has included revealing Himself in numerous ways to the people of the earth throughout history, as the Bible attests. The ultimate manifestation took place in the incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God, on earth (*John 1:1-14*). A crucial part of God's mission was completed during the Incarnation, namely the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which make eternal life possible for humanity.

Despite Jesus' extraordinary act of love and redemption some 2,000 years ago, we still find ourselves mired in the horror of this world. God's mission to lead us into eternal life in a re-created world is still in the future. The fulfillment of what God did through the Incarnation will find its most profound actualization in the resurrection of the faithful, who will be translated, along with the those who are living in relationship with God, when Jesus comes again (*1 Cor. 15:12-34*). Even this outcome is not the final fulfillment of God's redemption. That event occurs when the earth is re-created, as described in Revelation 21, 22.

God's mission is relationally centered, and it is in Revelation 21 and 22 that we, as readers, get a glimpse of God's relational desire to be with us in a more tangible form for eternity. Revelation 21 and 22 speak about God dwelling with humans face-to-face on earth (*Rev. 21:3, Rev. 22:4*). This cohabitation of the divine with humanity is the end goal of God's current mission related to us. It is beyond our imagination to feel and understand what living with God face-to-face will be like, but from the description in the Bible, it is something beautiful that should inspire those who read it to want a relationship with God now.

From this perspective, it could be argued that God's mission is completed in the new earth. Indeed, the plan of Redemption has played itself out at this stage. And yet, at some level, it seems God's mission continues beyond what we as humans can even fathom. Is the new earth the end or the beginning? In short, it is both.

As humans, we must keep in mind that we are created beings. As a result, we can never claim to be all-knowing as God is. Such a realization entails that humans will be eternal learners, constantly growing in understanding who God is and who we are in relation to God, one another, and the earth. Therefore, if we define the mission of God as being God's desire to reveal His love to humanity and have that love creatively replicated, then God's mission would have no end, but is, rather, an eternal, ongoing reality.

This understanding fits the biblical description of God more accurately, rather than claiming the new earth to be the end of His mission.

Instead, the new earth is a new beginning that builds on what has come before but eternally changes toward deeper and more meaningful relational love. In this sense, God's mission is an eternal activity in which we have the privilege of participating. Thus, the end of a particular phase of God's mission occurs at the Second Coming. But this ending leads into the next phase of God's mission. So, the new earth is not simply a completion; it also is a continuation.

The new earth phase of God's mission also is a time of abundance and joy, fulfilling what John 10:10 claims is God's purpose for humanity. The description of the new earth is one of diversity, with people from all different cultural backgrounds making up the population (*Rev. 21:24*). Under divine inspiration, John the revelator describes the redeemed joyfully eating and drinking together, partaking of the fruits of the tree of life and of the living water flowing from God's throne (*Rev. 21:6, Rev. 22:2*). The new earth is a place that gives the impression of creativity beyond our wildest imagination. God will be there among humanity, interacting with us, creating new ideas, and showing love in new ways alongside us. No wonder, then, that John's reaction was an urgent plea for God to come quickly (*Rev. 22:20*). The same desire inspires us today to share with others the good news of God's plans for the redeemed in eternity.

Part III: Life Application

Seventh-day Adventists pride themselves in having the message of the Second Coming front and center in their identity. This message is something for which we should be thankful and share with the broader world around us. There is no doubt that this message is one the world desperately needs to hear.

But the truth about the Second Coming goes beyond sharing a message. Humanity also needs to see what it means to live in the present with the hope of the Second Coming and of the new earth. Believing in the biblical description should lead to more than evangelistic sermons; there should be transformation to a radically different way of living in the present. Those who read Revelation 21 and 22 and understand the relational beauty it portrays should be drawn into this kind of life now. There are limits because of the impact of sin and death, but these constraints don't preclude the possibility of sharing glimpses of the new earth. For those who have experienced the love of God firsthand and believe in the promises of Scripture, eternal life begins now.

When the hope of the Second Coming and the reality of the new earth

Uttered in praise, joy, sorrow, and despair, spoken or sung in private and in public, by laypeople, kings, poets, and priests, coming from both righteous saints and repentant sinners, the Psalms have served as the prayer book and the hymnbook to generations of believers.

The Psalms are a collection of 150 poems, and the collection may not be as random as it appears. The Psalms bear witness to a spiritual journey that is common to many of God's children. The journey begins with a faith that is firmly established and secured by God's sovereign rule, and where good gets rewarded and evil is punished. As we progress through our study, we will see what happens when the well-ordered world of faith is challenged and threatened by evil. Does God still reign? How can believers sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Our prayer is that this study, entitled "The Book of Psalms" and authored by Dragoslava Santrac, will strengthen us on our life journey, and that through these poems, we will meet God daily, heart to heart, until the day when we see Jesus Christ face to face.

Lesson 1—How to Read the Psalms

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Psalms in Ancient Israel's Worship** (*Ps. 18:1*)

MONDAY: **Meet the Psalmists** (*Ps. 75:1, Psalm 72*)

TUESDAY: **A Song for Every Season** (*Ps. 3:1–8, Ps. 33:1–3*)

WEDNESDAY: **Inspired Prayers** (*Ps. 39:12*)

THURSDAY: **The World of the Psalms** (*Ps. 44:8*)

Memory Text—*Luke 24:44, 45, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Accepting the Psalms as God's Word and paying close attention to their poetic features, as well as their historical, theological, and liturgical contexts, is fundamental for understanding their messages.

Lesson 2—Teach Us to Pray

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Fostering the Use of the Psalms in Prayer** (*Ps. 105:5*)

MONDAY: **Trust in Times of Trouble** (*Psalm 44*)

TUESDAY: **A Psalm of Despair** (*Psalm 22*)

WEDNESDAY: **From Despair to Hope** (*Psalm 13*)

THURSDAY: **Oh, Restore Us Again** (*Ps. 60:1–5*)

Memory Text—*Luke 11:1, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The Psalms are prayers and, as such, are invaluable, not only for their theological insight but also for the ways they can enrich and transform our individual and communal prayers.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on MP3 disc, and via online download to people who are legally blind individuals who cannot hold or focus on ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, Inc., Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: info@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.